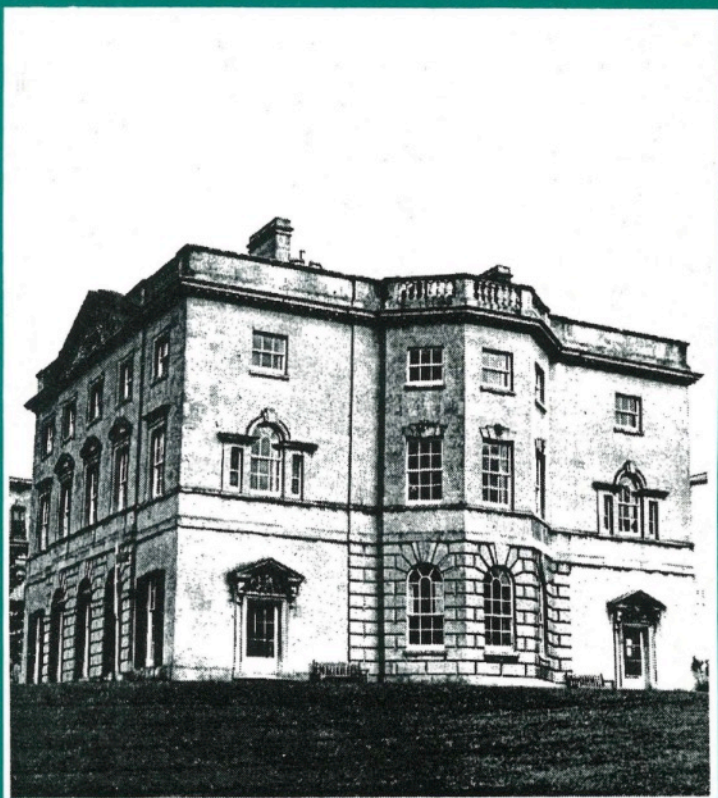


**THE ROYAL FORT AND
TYNDALL'S PARK:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
BRISTOL LANDSCAPE**



JOSEPH BETTEY

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Cover Illustration: Royal Fort House built by Thomas Tyndall in 1760.
The elegant Georgian house was at the centre of his 68-acre park.

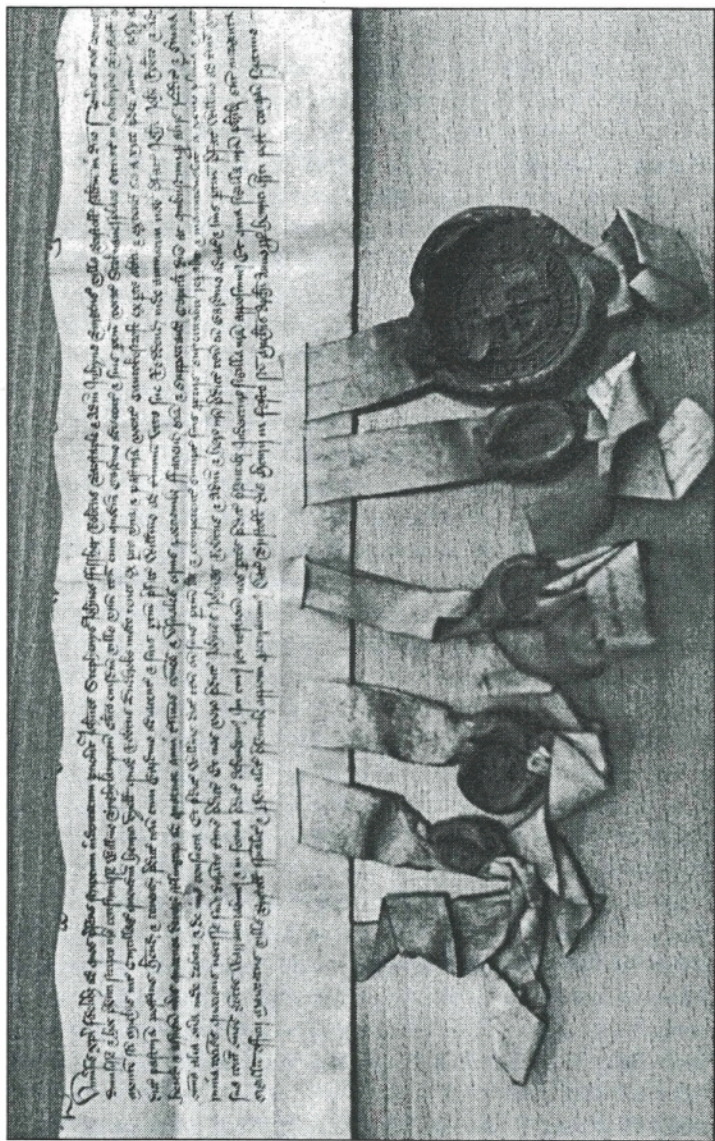
THE ROYAL FORT AND TYNDALL'S PARK: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BRISTOL LANDSCAPE

Recent work on the topography of the central area of Bristol has produced remarkable new insights into the development of the town within its medieval walls.¹ This pamphlet examines the way in which one of the suburbs beyond the walls was gradually transformed by the prosperity and growth of late-medieval Bristol, and later by the dramatic expansion of the town and its population. It also illustrates the pressures created as the wealthy merchants moved away from the unhealthy harbour and sought dwellings on the surrounding hillsides. The land on which the University of Bristol, the City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol Grammar School and all the surrounding shops, offices and houses now stand is notable for the long period over which its ownership and use can be traced, and for the wealth of documentary evidence which exists concerning its history from the thirteenth century onwards. During the later Middle Ages much of this area was part of the large estates of St Augustine's abbey which later became Bristol cathedral, and medieval account rolls, deeds, leases and rentals survive among the abbey and cathedral archives which are now in the Bristol Record Office. After the suppression of the abbey, this land became part of the endowment of Bristol cathedral and continued to appear regularly in the copious records of the Dean and Chapter.²

Throughout the Middle Ages the steep hillside known as St Michael's Hill to the north-west of the town of Bristol was a gorse-covered common, with a few enclosures for pasture. It overlooked the busy medieval port of Bristol, dominated by the numerous church towers and by its strongly-fortified royal castle, and also looked down on the religious houses along the river Frome. The gardens of the Franciscan and Carmelite friaries and of the hospitals of St Bartholomew and St Mark extended up the hillside, while on a promontory above the junction

of the Frome and the Avon was St Augustine's abbey, the wealthiest of the Bristol religious foundations. On the hillside, close to St Michael's church, was the small Augustinian nunnery of St Mary Magdalen. The main road out of Bristol towards Gloucester and to the passage across the Severn into Wales rose steeply up St Michael's Hill, past the church and by the gallows at the summit where criminals and heretics were executed. During the thirteenth century a large part of this hillside became known as Cantock's Closes, and this name has survived through the centuries and is still used for the road leading to the University's Chemistry Department.

The de Cantock or Quantock family from whom this name derives arrived in Bristol from west Somerset during the early thirteenth century, a time of rapid expansion when fortunes could be made by energetic merchants and when people crowded to the flourishing port from all over the west country. The de Cantocks prospered, and by the 1240s members of the family were already sufficiently important to be named as a witness to several grants of land to the master and brethren of St Mark's Hospital. In 1267 Roger de Cantock was reeve or bailiff of Bristol and for several years took an important part in the government of the town and control of the port.³ Roger de Cantock's son, also Roger, was a priest and inherited a considerable estate from his father notably the manor of Dyrham in south Gloucestershire and property in Bristol including lands on Brandon Hill and St Michael's Hill. Some of this land he used in 1330 to endow chantries in the nunnery church of St Mary Magdalen and in the parish church of Holy Trinity.⁴ Roger de Cantock was one of the many victims of the Black Death of 1348-49 which affected Bristol very badly; he died on 18 June 1349 and much of his land passed into the hands of the abbot and canons of St Augustine's abbey. By the time of his death four enclosures on St Michael's Hill, amounting to 24 acres, were already known as Cantock's Closes.⁵ In 1373 these fields were named in the Charter granted to Bristol by Edward III separating Bristol from the counties of Gloucestershire and Somerset and declaring that '... it shall be a County of itself and be called the County of Bristol for ever'. The Charter described the boundary of the new county in detail, and on the western side it passed across 'a certain close called Fockyng grove', a name which survived until the nineteenth century as Pucking Grove and is now the site of Queen's Road and the City Museum and Art Gallery. From there the boundary went 'directly eastwards along a certain long ditch from stone to stone ... (to) a certain close called Cantockes clos', and from there through the lands of the nunnery of St Mary Magdalen and around the northern edge of the town.⁶



A lease of 'Stokesmanesplace' on St Michael's Hill next to 'Cantokescroft' dated 1406.
This is one of several medieval leases of lands on the hillside (Bristol Record Office)

By the late fourteenth century a house and garden had been built on part of the land, and these are described in a lease of 1406 granted by St Augustine's abbey in which it is called 'Cantockescroft'.⁷ In 1428, however, the abbey took 'Cantokkesclos' into its own hands, using it to pasture animals and to produce hay. In 1491-2, for example, the accounts of the abbey chamberlain record that a rental of £1 6s 8d had been received for the house and garden, while two crops of hay worth £4 0s 0d had been taken from the land. The chamberlain's expenses included 4d for catching moles on the land, 5s 0d for ditching and £2 5s 7d for cutting and making the hay.⁸

Throughout the Middle Ages most of the land on the slopes of St Michael's Hill remained as pasture or rough grazing, with only a few houses or buildings, since although Bristol was an important port and trading town, settlement had not expanded far from the tightly-packed central area. In 1348 a lease was granted for two shops on St Michael's Hill and during the fifteenth century there are numerous references to houses and shops near the nunnery and around St Michael's parish church, and to a few tenements and barns in the fields. For example, a list made in 1407 of the lands and properties belonging to the parish of Christchurch in Bristol, and which formed the endowment of chantry priests, included 'a messuage and garden called Stokmanesplace on St Michael's Hill by the pasture called Cantockescroft', and there are also references to three shops with gardens and to a barn. No doubt the shops were situated on the main thoroughfare where it climbed steeply out of Bristol past St Michael's church.⁹

During the period 1536-39 all the religious houses were suppressed and their estates confiscated by the Crown. The land on St Michael's Hill which had belonged to St Mark's Hospital and some of the lands of the nunnery were purchased from the Crown by the Corporation of Bristol, part of a judicious investment which, because of rising land values, was to make Bristol one of the richest towns in the kingdom.¹⁰ The lands of St Augustine's abbey, including Cantock's Closes, Jochin's Closes, King's Orchard and Tinker's Close were at first leased by the Crown to William Greensmith, yeoman, of Hampton, Middlesex, who also obtained a lease of the former abbey buildings. In 1542, however, Bristol was chosen as one of the six new dioceses created by Henry VIII; the former abbey church of St Augustine became the cathedral and Bristol was formally named as a city. The lease granted to William Greensmith was revoked, and the lands on St Michael's Hill became part of the widespread estates which were granted by the Crown as the endowment for the bishop, dean, six canons and numerous servants of the new cathedral.¹¹ At the same time the buildings of the small nunnery

of St Mary Magdalen, which were known as the Maudlin and has given its name to the modern Maudlin Street, were turned into a dwelling house and leased first to Dame Joan Guildeford and subsequently to members of the Gorges family. The nunnery was poor and very small, having at its dissolution only one elderly nun and a young novice, together with two servants. The annual income was £21 13s 2d. The nuns' chapel and accommodation was across the road from St Michael's church and their grounds occupied part of St Michael's Hill.¹² The annual accounts and the leases of their lands granted by the Dean and Chapter of the new Bristol cathedral, together with deeds, and surveys of the mansion, lands, stables, gardens and orchards around St Michael's parish church which were occupied by the wealthy Gorges family provide copious details about the whole of St Michael's Hill during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹³

Evidence for the unenclosed pasture, scrub and woodland of the hillside and beyond to Redland, and of the land on either side of the road from Bristol to Gloucester, comes from an unexpected source. During all the religious upheavals of the century several of those who refused to accept the current orthodoxy were burnt at the stake for heresy at the top of St Michael's Hill near where the Highbury chapel now stands. In his horrific description of one of these executions, John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs* published in 1563, recorded that when William Saxton, a Bristol weaver, was to be burnt in September 1556 a fire of green wood had been prepared which would have prolonged the unfortunate man's agony. His friends therefore gathered dry wood and gorse nearby and from Redland 'which indeed made good dispatch with little pain, in comparison to that he should have suffered' and the poor man died 'constantly and patiently with great joyfulness'.¹⁴

Throughout the later sixteenth century the corporation of Bristol gradually acquired more of the land on St Michael's Hill adjoining that belonging to the Dean and Chapter. In 1541 the corporation obtained from the Crown various enclosures which had belonged to the nunnery of St Mary Magdalen 'next to a road called Magdalen lane' and worth 10s 0d per annum. In 1584 a charter of Queen Elizabeth granting lands and properties to the Mayor and Commonalty included three ruined tenements and gardens 'in the suburbs of the city in a place called Michaell Hill'.¹⁵ Enclosures on the upper slopes of the hill had been made by individuals who gave their names to the fields such as Jorkin's or Jochin's Close, Aysthenn's Close and Tinker's Close which was later 'gentrified' as Tankard's Close and survives beside the Royal Fort. The rapid growth of Bristol led to an increasing number of cottages and tenements being built along the roadsides and in Cantock's Closes, and

these can be traced in the detailed Parliamentary Survey of the lands of the Dean and Chapter made in 1649, and through the remarkable series of deeds, leases and plans in the Cathedral archives.¹⁶ Information about buildings erected on the lands of the former nunnery comes from the records of the Gorges family. For example, a deed of 1596 refers to 'a Capital messuage and manor house called the Mawdlens on St Michael's Hill and a ruined messuage and tenement adjoining with a stable and well'. Later deeds include references to cottages, tenements, barns, stables, gardens and orchards around St Michael's church.¹⁷

During the autumn of 1642, as the hostility of the rival forces of the Crown and Parliament deepened and the threat of civil war increased, Bristol Corporation began work on the expensive task of surrounding the city with defensive earthworks. On the west of the city the fortifications ran from Brandon Hill fort down through what is now Berkeley Square but was then a field called Bullock's Park, near to the site of the present Museum, which was to prove to be the weakest point. From there the earthworks continued up to the hill-top then known as Windmill Fort and later as the Royal Fort. The defences continued to Kingsdown and on to Stokes Croft, eventually encircling the city with an earthen bank 4 to 6 feet high and a ditch 6 feet wide and 5 feet deep. This was an area which was crucial for the defence of Bristol, since whoever controlled these high points could fire their cannon balls into the heart of the city. The creation of such large-scale defences was very expensive and was paid for by heavy taxation and forced loans imposed upon the people of Bristol. Many were also conscripted to work on the projects themselves. Likewise people from the surrounding area were obliged to labour on the Bristol defences. For example, in June 1644 a royal warrant ordered that a force of three score labourers should be raised in south Gloucestershire 'with good and serviceable spades and pickaxes' and be forced to work on the Royal Fort in Bristol 'for a few days'. The construction and defences were completed by December 1644. The forts on Brandon Hill and Windmill Hill were strongly defended and with six or seven big guns were well able to resist any assaults. When an attack on the western defences of the city from the royalist forces led by Prince Rupert came in July 1643, the two forts remained impregnable, but the royalist dragoons under Colonel Henry Washington managed to penetrate the rampart in the shallow depression which is now the top of Park Street, and which became known as 'Washington's Breach'. As a result the city fell to the royalists who immediately strengthened even further the defensive earthworks. The Windmill Hill fort became Prince Rupert's headquarters, and was reinforced with massive stone defences 10-12 feet in height together with a moat, creating a five-sided fortress equipped

with twenty-two cannons, and now named the Royal Fort. The evidence for these major works can still be seen in the Royal Fort grounds, while the Parliamentary Survey of Cantock's Closes and Jorkin's Close which was made in 1649 commented that the pasture land there was 'now for the most part turned into Bull works called the Royal Fort'.¹⁸

Following the royalist surrender in the face of Cromwell's army and the Parliamentary occupation of Bristol in 1645, the Royal Fort and the other defences were strengthened even more. But in 1655, with Parliament triumphant, Cromwell ordered the destruction of the fortifications and the citizens of Bristol were compelled to pay large sums for labourers to destroy the works which had so recently and expensively been completed. The Royal Fort was almost completely demolished, with only the earthen ramparts, a gatehouse and a few minor buildings surviving, together with the name which has been retained ever since. By the early nineteenth century the notable Bristol historian, the Reverend Samuel Seyer, who lived in the gatehouse and kept a school there, was frustrated at being able to find so little information about the Royal Fort, 'although I dwelt in the gatehouse for twenty years; so completely is it demolished and the memory of it passed away'.¹⁹ After the Restoration in 1660, several houses were erected around the Royal Fort by the Corporation, and the site itself was occupied by a large house which later became the residence of John Elbridge, who held the lucrative position of Deputy-controller of Customs in Bristol, and who was a noted philanthropist. Elbridge was one of the founders of the Bristol Infirmary in 1737 and served as the hospital's first treasurer. He also endowed a school for girls in Jochin's or Jorkin's Close on the eastern part of the Royal Fort land, adjoining St Michael's Hill, near the site of the present Children's Hospital. He died in February 1739 leaving more than £42,000; this included £3,000 for his school, £5,000 for the Infirmary and £7,000 for other charities. The school provided education and clothing for 24 girls. The schoolroom measured 50 feet by 15 feet, with a house for the mistress attached, a garden and paved playground. The girls were taught 'reading, writing, summing and plain needlework ... so as to fit them for the business of servants'. They were also instructed in 'the elements of christian duty and belief' and were provided with suitable clothing.²⁰

During the later seventeenth century many more tenements were erected along St Michael's Hill and the road which was later to be known as Park Row. Some sixteenth and seventeenth-century houses can still be seen on the steep slope of St Michael's Hill while the remains of others can be found to the west of the parish church; across the road the impressive group of almshouses founded by Edward Colston was built

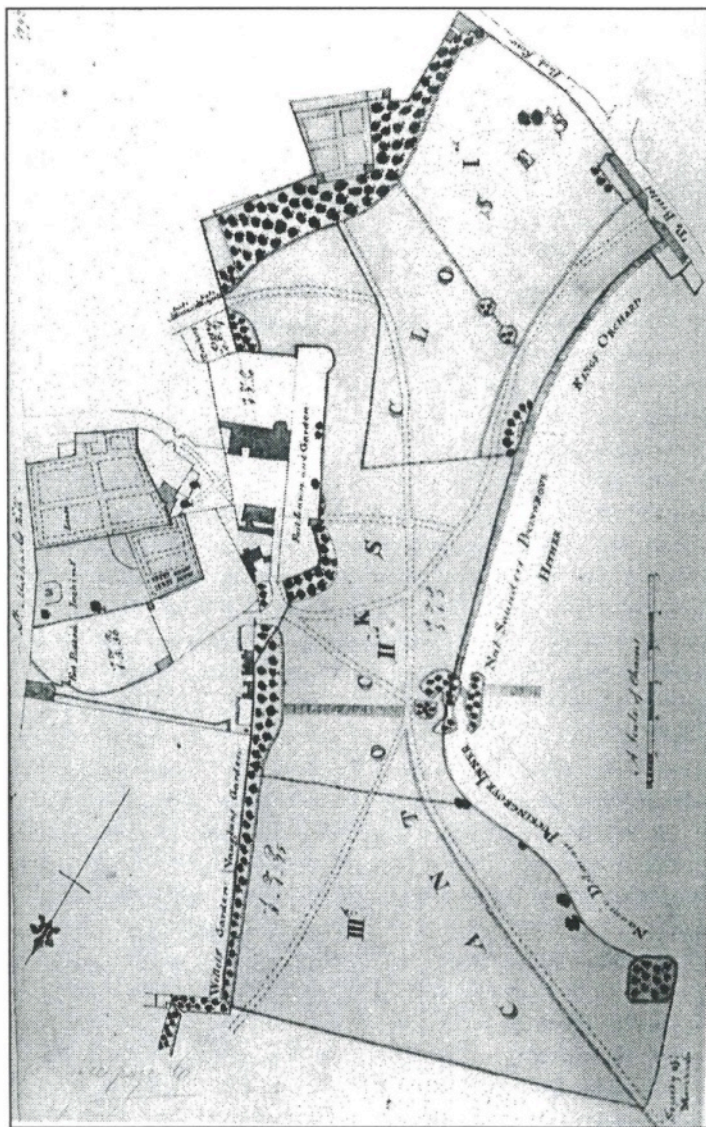
in 1691. An indication of these developments can be seen in Jacob Millerd's map of Bristol published in 1671. This shows several houses on the site of the Royal Fort and in the area to the south and east, while Millerd himself remarked on the rapid spread of houses in the area and noted that

'... in a few years past, this Cittie hath been much augmented by the increase in buildings in most parts thereof, especially on the West and North-West sides, where the rising of the Hill St Michael being converted into comely buildings and pleasant gardens makes a very beautiful addition to the suburbs thereof'.

Apart from the houses along St Michael's Hill, many of the other late seventeenth-century tenements and cottages were to be swept away by the Tyndall family who began to acquire leases of the land during the early eighteenth century. The Tyndalls were a long-established family from south Gloucestershire and an earlier member of the family, William Tyndale, made the vastly-influential translation of most of the Bible into English and was martyred for his beliefs in 1536. Onesiphorus Tyndall came to Bristol in 1674 and rapidly established a prosperous business as a drysalter, grocer and West India merchant. Like his illustrious forbear, Onesiphorus Tyndall was critical of the established Church of his day, and he became a leading figure in the Lewins Mead presbyterian congregation, serving as its treasurer in 1704. He was also active in public life in Bristol, and was a prominent member of the Society for the Reformation of Manners during the early eighteenth century. He was a councillor from 1703 to 1712 and Sheriff of Bristol in 1707-8. In 1712 he resigned from the Council rather than face the £40 fine and disqualification from office imposed by the Occasional Conformity Act for attending a dissenting religious meeting. In 1725 and 1729-30 Onesiphorus Tyndall is named as the joint owner with Isaac Hobhouse of a ship the *Cato* which sailed to West Africa and thence with cargoes of slaves to Barbados, completing its journey by bringing sugar, ivory and redwood back to Bristol. His son, John Tyndall, obtained leases of Cantock's Closes from the Dean and Chapter, he predeceased his father and on his death without issue in 1743 his leases passed to his brother, Onesiphorus II. Onesiphorus Tyndall II was also a wealthy merchant and one of the founders of the Old Bank, the first bank to be established in Bristol. By the time of his death in 1757 he had obtained leases of most of Cantock's Closes together with the site of the Royal Fort and of the nearby Tinker's Close with its garden and summer house which had been built by another Bristol merchant, Thomas Jones.²¹

It was Thomas Tyndall, the son of Onesiphorus II, who completed the transformation of the whole area. In 1758 the Common Council of Bristol renewed his lease of a house in the Royal Fort for a fine of £60 and an annual rent of £6. In 1762 he bought the freehold from the Council for £670. He soon acquired the freehold of the Royal Fort from the Corporation and most of the surrounding property, and energetically demolished houses, cottages and buildings to create an elegant parkland. For example, a lease granted to him by the Dean and Chapter in 1767 lists numerous buildings and notes that 'All which have by Permission of the Dean and Chapter been Pulled down and Erased by the said Thomas Tyndall or his Order'. Thomas Tyndall also demolished many of the stone walls which had divided the area into paddocks, transformed the area into a park, planted trees and erected an impressive entrance to his park from Park Row, with an imposing gateway flanked by two Lodges.²² Thomas Tyndall demolished the house which had been occupied by John Elbridge, and commissioned James Bridges to design one of the most elegant of Bristol's Georgian mansions overlooking his fine park. Bridges designed the house to join an existing building on the north side, and engaged the Bristol sculptor, Thomas Paty, to provide the ornate carving, while the fine plasterwork of the interior was created by Thomas Stocking. The house and its surrounding parkland, a secluded rural retreat, yet so close to the busy town and port, are shown on a large-scale plan which was produced for Thomas Tyndall in 1785.²³

At the same time that the Tyndalls were acquiring land, building their elegant house and laying out their park, the land along St Michael's Hill and around St Michael's church was being divided into plots where more and more houses were being built to accommodate wealthy Bristol merchants and their families. Those who could afford it were no longer content to live in the cramped central area of the city, close to the malodorous harbour where the ships were floated by the tide only for two brief periods each day and where the summer stench from the mud which received most of the sewage of Bristol was almost insupportable. In 1732 there is a reference to five houses newly-erected in Tinker's Close which now became known as Tankard's Close, and by 1738 one of the leading property developers, William Matthew, could make 'An Estimate of my Estate on St Michael's Hill' and list fourteen houses as well as gardens, orchards, a warehouse, an alehouse, a distillery and 'a walk near 50 yards for spinning twine etc.'²⁴ William Matthew was the owner of two vessels trading with the West Indies and is listed among those engaged in the slave trade in 1726 when he sold 280 slaves in Jamaica and a further 227 in Virginia. During the 1730s he sold numerous plots for houses on St Michael's Hill to various merchants, an



Part of a plan of Tyndall's Park made for Thomas Tyndall in 1785. Royal Fort House is in the centre, and Park Row at the bottom right (Bristol Record Office)

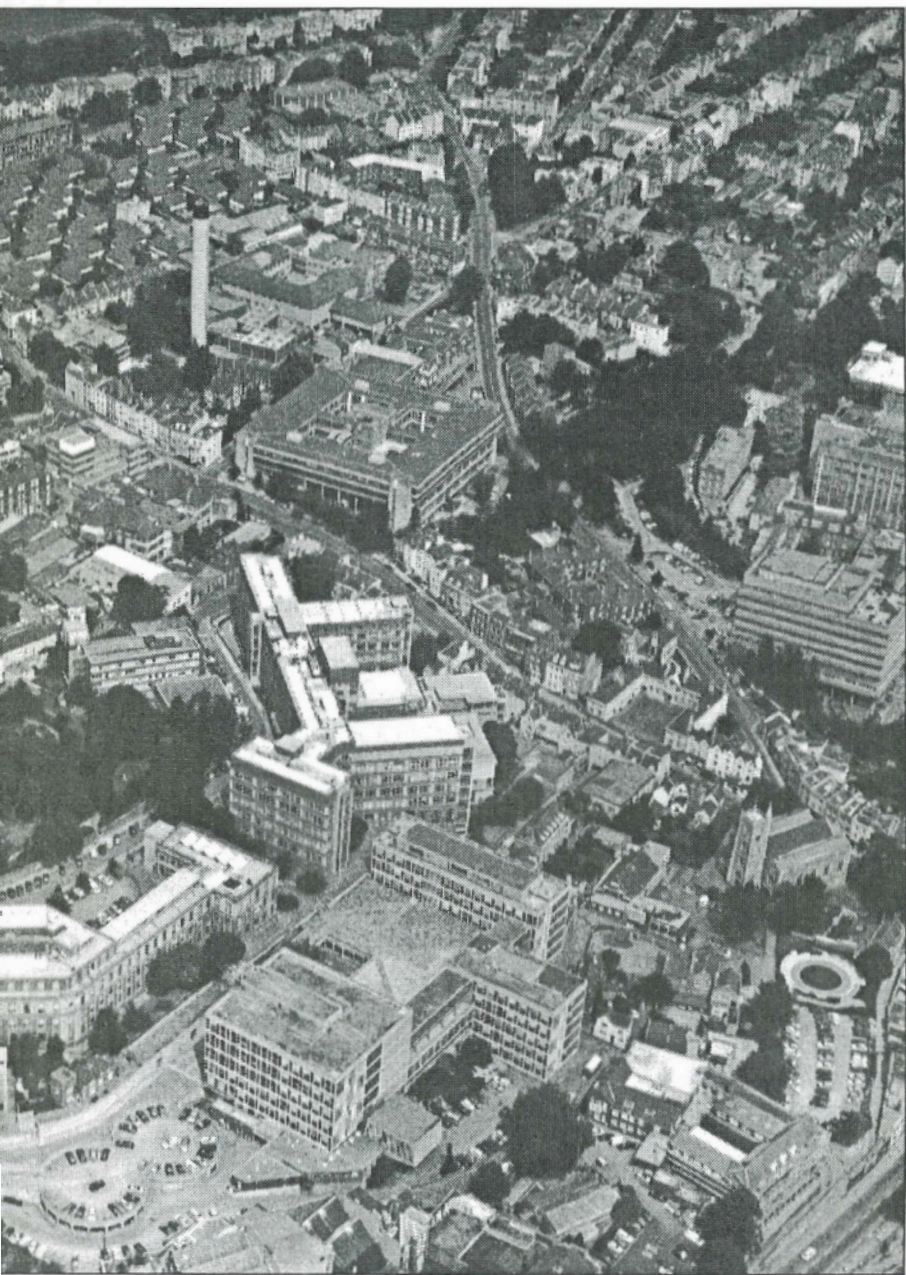
ironmonger, a house carpenter, cordwainer, plumber and a hooper. It is interesting to note that in 1736 the Mayor and Burgesses of Bristol bought one of the plots since the proposed house 'would have very much annoyed the Tennants of the said Mayor, Burgesses and Commonalty residing in the Royal Fort thereto adjoining ...'.²⁵ Many of the plots were acquired by the Smyth family of Ashton Court and details of the land and of the houses built on it are contained in the records kept by Jarritt Smith who obtained control of the Ashton Court estates from the 1730s.²⁶ Tenants on the Dean and Chapter property in Cantock's Closes during the early eighteenth century included several merchants, numerous widows, labourers, a gardener, a mariner and a writing master. Most of their houses were later bought by the Tyndall family and demolished. For example, the house of James Stewart, writing master, which faced on to Park Row was demolished so that the grand entrance with two lodges could be built.²⁷

By the 1760s Thomas Tyndall's plans were complete. His fine house with its beautiful interiors of plasterwork and carved wood was finished, although sadly his young wife, Alicia, did not live to enjoy the new house; she died in 1764 shortly after the birth of their son, Thomas. Equally impressive was the extensive and secluded park, so close to the busy and expanding port of Bristol and with wide views across the river Avon to the Somerset hills beyond. Thomas Tyndall had obtained for his park all the land sloping down to Park Row and to where the Museum now stands, together with Pucking Grove which occupied the site of the Triangle and Queen's Road, and all the property stretching away to the present Whiteladies Road and to Cotham Hill. All this is shown on the fine map of his estate which he commissioned in 1785. The Royal Fort itself was surrounded by lawns and formal gardens, while a belt of trees hid the view of the houses along St Michael's Hill. The park comprised 68 acres, it was crossed by a few footpaths, but not by any public roads. From the gateway on Park Row a winding drive led the visitor up the hillside to the house, while further clumps of trees across the park added to the feeling of rural seclusion. Another entrance to the Royal Fort was via Fort Lane at the top of St Michael's Hill.

The eighteenth century was Bristol's 'golden age' when the city was at the height of its prosperity and its trade was rivalled only by that of London. As the population increased the building land in the suburbs became more and more valuable, and the pressures upon Tyndall's Park which was so conveniently situated, became ever more intense. To accommodate the increasing number of parishioners, St Michael's church was rebuilt and enlarged in 1774-7, at a cost of £3,100, preserving only the fifteenth-century tower from the old church. During the 1780s houses



Aerial view of part of Tyndall's Park now almost completely covered by buildings



ings. The Royal Fort is in the centre (University of Bristol Information Office)

and shops were built in Park Street and even finer houses in Great George Street, Charlotte Street and Berkeley Square, as Bristol was seized by a mania of speculative building projects and the price of land escalated. There seemed to be no end to the demand for houses or to the profits which could be made, and developers were prepared to offer ever higher prices.²⁸ At the height of this fever of speculation, Thomas Tyndall was persuaded to accept the enormous sum of £40,000 for his park from a consortium of property developers. Large-scale work was started in the park, house plots were laid out, roads were constructed and huge trenches dug, with devastating effects on the parkland. At the same time the Dean and Chapter were persuaded that they could greatly increase the Cathedral income by releasing more of their land in Cantock's Closes, Jochin's Close and on St Michael's Hill for development. In 1792 they obtained an Act of Parliament enabling them to proceed with an imaginative scheme. This was to lay out a whole suburb, consisting of

'a Crescent, Square, Circus, several Streets and other buildings upon a Regular Plan ... the same would form a regular and grand Plan of Building which would very much improve the said City and the said lands of the Dean and Chapter'.

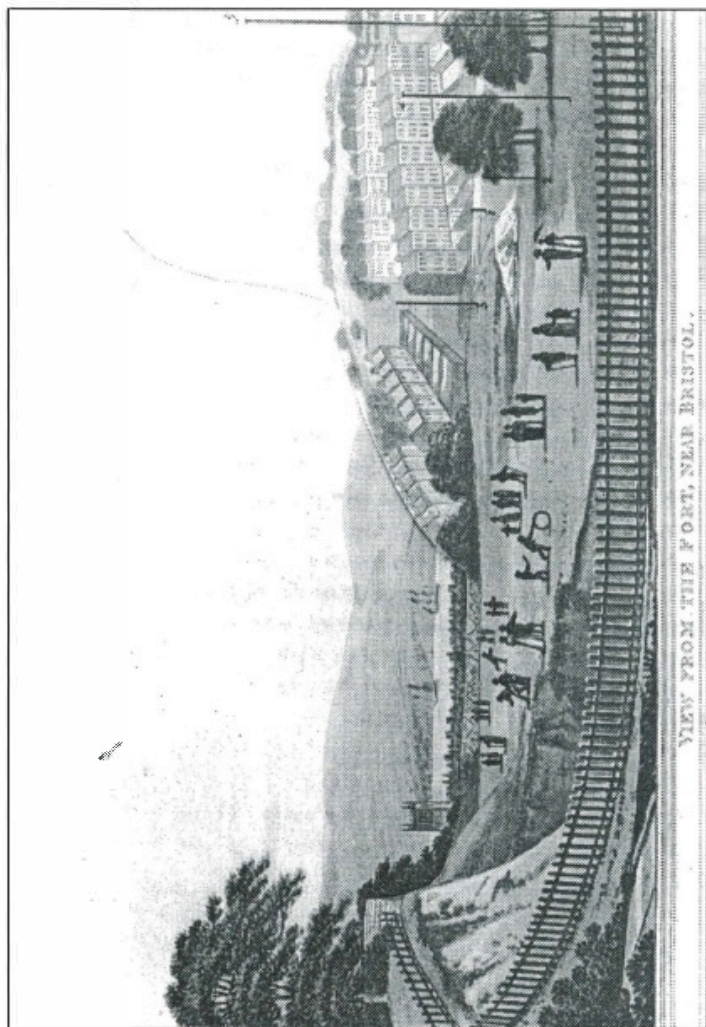
This plan had been drawn up by a consortium consisting of Thomas Griffith Vaughan, merchant and banker, John Weeks, vintner, and James Weekes, gentleman, and the whole concept was to be designed by James Wyatt, the leading and most fashionable architect of the time. If these ambitions had been realised they would have rivalled the similar buildings which had been erected in Bath. They would also have brought a greatly increased income to the Dean and Chapter who by the terms of the Act were to receive one-third of all the income from the properties. The Act enabled them to grant a 1,000 year lease of the site.²⁹

Unfortunately for the Dean and Chapter, these proposals for development could not have come at a worse time. The outbreak of war with France in 1793 led to a rapid recession in trade and an evaporation of confidence, and the property boom collapsed. House building ceased, numerous builders and developers, including Thomas Griffith Vaughan, became bankrupt, and for the next five or six years many parts of Bristol and Clifton presented the melancholy spectacle of half-finished houses, and as late as 1807 a visitor commented that the scene resembled the desolation 'occasioned by a siege, or the ravages of a plague'.³⁰

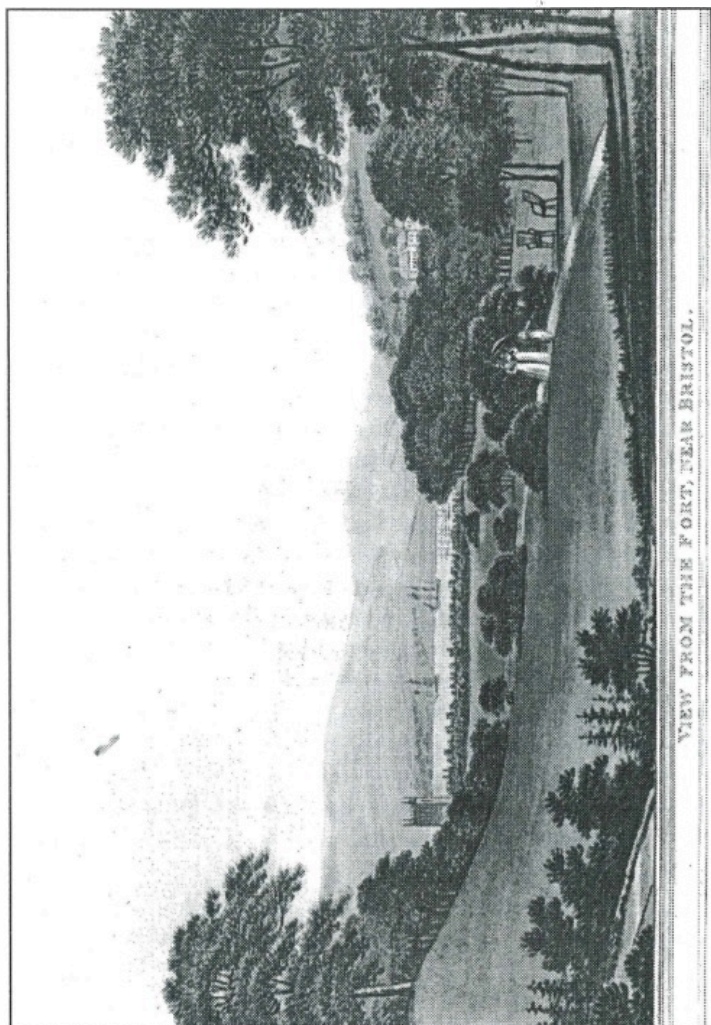
No work had been started on the Dean and Chapter land, but Thomas Tyndall's park had been wrecked by the developers. Roads had been

partially made, foundations partly dug, and everywhere there were excavation, trenches and all the upheaval of a large building site. In 1794 Thomas Tyndall died, leaving his property to his son, Thomas. The bankruptcy of the developers meant that they were unable to complete their purchase of Tyndalls Park, and in 1798 it reverted to Thomas Tyndall. He now faced not only the problem of restoring the park to its former glory, but also of reinstating the seclusion which had previously made it so attractive. The building boom which had created the shops and houses in Park Street, Great George Street and Charlotte Street, and had produced the houses in Berkeley Square, many of the latter only half completed, could be clearly seen from the Royal Fort terraces and from the park. To provide a solution, Thomas Tyndall called in Humphry Repton, the most famous landscape designer of the time, to repair the damage and restore the distant views whilst hiding the new houses in the foreground. Much of Repton's impressive solution to the problem survives. He used some of the trenches and mounds of earth left by the developers for sunken footpaths, and carefully sited clumps of trees and shrubs to conceal unwanted intrusions. Evidently Repton was proud of the way he had solved the difficult problem, and had restored much of the charm and privacy of the house and park, for when he summarised his views on landscape and his achievements in his *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* 1805, he included an account of his work on the Royal Fort and one of his well-known 'before' and 'after' views in which an overlapping flap showed the problem he faced, while beneath was the solution he had adopted. The 'before' view showed very clearly the new houses in Charlotte Street and Berkeley Square and in the foreground numerous Bristolians strolled along the paths across the park while their children played with hoops and balls. Clearly to be seen were the deep trenches, mounds of earth and scarred landscape of the park which had been left by the developers. The 'after' illustration shows how the park would appear when Repton's proposals had been adopted, and presumably when his trees had matured. The footpaths were now sunken so that passers-by were no longer visible and were denied a view of the residents of the Royal Fort as they sat on their terrace. Trees and shrubs concealed Charlotte Street and most of Berkeley Square, while still permitting a view of the tower of the Cathedral with the river Avon and its shipping beyond and Dundry Hill in the distance.

An interesting view of the area while Tyndalls Park remained intact and before it was transformed by roads and buildings is to be found in Ashmead's map of Bristol in 1828. This shows the Royal Fort house, with its stables and outbuildings, surrounded by lawns and gardens as



*'Before' view from the Royal Fort in Humphry Repton's illustration.
The flap which would reveal his proposals can be clearly seen*

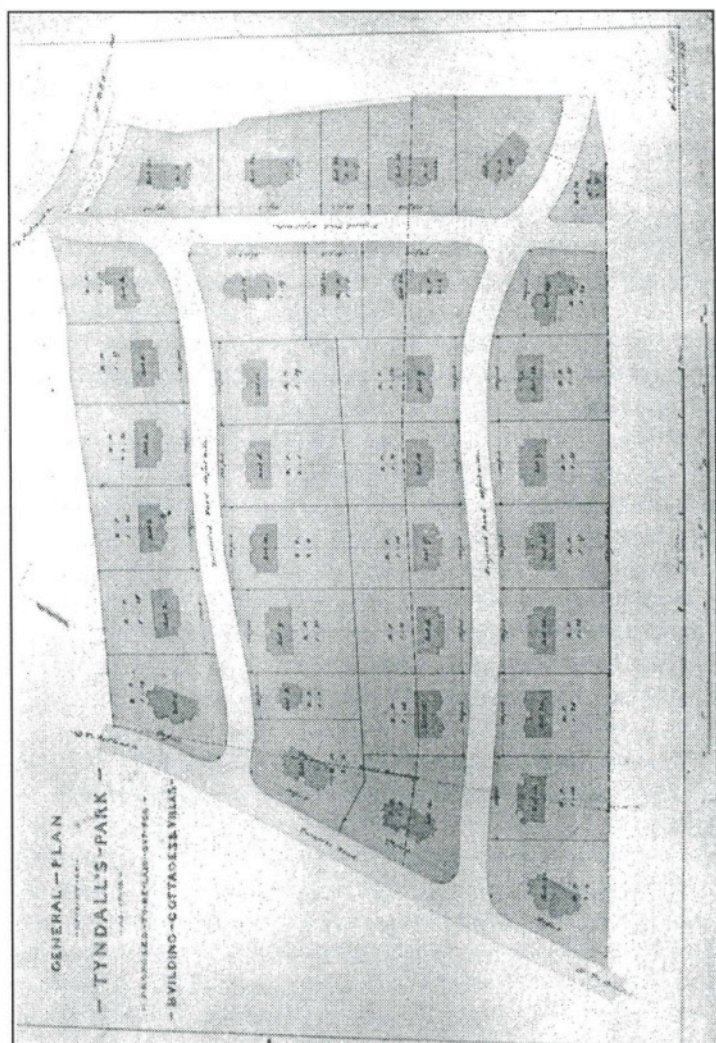


*'After': the same scene with the flap lifted to show how it would appear
after the adoption of Repton's proposals*

they had been landscaped by Repton, and with the park stretching away to the west and north west. Only to the south east around St Michael's church are the tightly-packed houses and gardens evident, along Church Lane, Upper Church Lane, Old Park and Park Place. Houses also line St Michael's Hill on either side, including the distinctive Colston's almshouses, while John Elbridge's school occupies the site at the junction with Fort Lane. In 1828 the spreading parkland remained as a remarkable contrast with the packed and busy city in the valley below, but its days were numbered and it could not for much longer withstand the pressure from the rapidly-expanding Bristol.

The pressure for land, the vastly increasing value of building plots and the need for new or improved roads, were to prove irresistible. In 1825 the road now known as Aberdeen Road was cut across the western end of the park, and shortly afterwards another road, West Park, was constructed running parallel to the first, and strips of land along Park Row were released for building during the 1830s. One large house in Park Row near the Red Lodge was occupied by 'Bristol College', a non-denominational college which opened in 1831. It was founded by a group of Bristolians who were concerned at the lack of facilities for higher education in the city, and at the exclusion of dissenters from the Universities. For a few years it was successful, and several of the students were to become famous, most notably Walter Bagehot who was later an eminent authority on the constitution. But the college fell victim to religious controversy and to the attacks of those who opposed 'godless education', and was forced to close in 1841.

Some parts of their park were only held on lease by the Tyndall family, and one of these was the area known as the King's Orchard which is now occupied by the City Museum and the Wills Memorial Building of the University. This land belonged to Bristol Corporation and in 1833 they refused to renew the lease and sold an area of 1¼ acres as a site for the Red Maids' school which was in cramped and unsuitable conditions in Denmark Street. The price was £1,270. Although some construction work was done, constant changes of mind over the school building, difficulties over finance and indecision about the specifications meant that it was only half completed before 1835 when the new Municipal Corporations Act caused the project to be suspended and the Red Maids' school remained in Denmark Street.³¹ Eventually the site and building was purchased for £9,750 by Dr James Henry Monk, the bishop of the recently-combined dioceses of Gloucester and Bristol, and opened in 1841 as a Church school or 'Bishop's College'. The rivalry of this Anglican establishment was incidentally to bring about the final demise of the nearby 'Bristol College'. Meanwhile, in 1834 an adjacent site in



Plan of the proposed streets and houses on the western part of Tyndall's Park, prepared by the architect, Charles Dyer, in 1830. Whiteladies Road is on the left (University of Bristol Library)

the former King's Orchard was sold by the Corporation for £1,850 to the trustees of the Blind Asylum and School of Industry who erected a large Gothic building with turrets, castellations and lancet windows which was designed by Thomas Rickman on the area now occupied by the tower and front part of the Wills Memorial Building.³²

Although the Bishop's College lasted for twenty years, it did not enjoy the success which its promoters had hoped for, and in 1861 the building was sold to the Volunteer Rifle Corps for £5,400, and a large drill-hall which cost £2,500 was erected at the rear. This was opened in 1862 and for a time was the largest hall in the country, its wide-span roof being supported without intermediate pillars. During the 1840s the City Council set about the task of improving the narrow road from the top of Park Street to Whiteladies Road, and in 1851 work was begun on a new thoroughfare which was to be known as Queen's Road. In 1852 a further strip of Tyndall's Park was taken in order to widen Whiteladies Road. The Victoria Rooms were built in 1839-40 to designs by Charles Dyer and rapidly became a popular place of assembly and entertainment for the wealthy and fashionable society of the expanding area. A new hotel, The Queen's Hotel, was built in Queen's Road and opened in 1854. This was rapidly followed by numerous shops, lining both sides of the thoroughfare. The most notable feature of the new Queen's Road was the large parade of shops built along the north side in 1859. These became known as the Royal Parade. This ambitious project, much grander than any shops previously seen in Bristol, was designed to provide high-quality shopping for the wealthy and fashionable residents of Clifton. Its remarkable architecture and some of the arcade partly survives in spite of severe bomb damage and the intrusion of modern shop fronts.³³

As the edges of his park were slowly eroded by building development, Thomas Tyndall decided during the 1830s to sell much of the rest. Even so, building work proceeded only slowly. The first step was a plan drawn up by the architect, Charles Dyer, which laid out the roads which were later to become Belgrave Road, Tyndall's Park Road, and the upper part of Woodland Road, allocating plots for the houses which were to be built along each road.³⁴ During the next decade many of these fine villa residences were built, and Tyndalls Park Road connected Whiteladies Road with Cotham. It was for the new residents of this area that St Mary's church was built at the western end of the park. The church began life as a galvanised iron structure in 1865, capable of accommodating 400 people, but in 1870 a more permanent building was begun, designed by J.P. St Aubyn. It was consecrated in 1874 although not completed until 1881 at a cost of £9,700. St Mary's church was paid

for by private subscription, much of the money coming from the Bristol postmaster, Todd Walton, who became the patron. In 1867 a new Bristol Theatre, the New Theatre Royal, later to be called the Prince's Theatre, opened in Park Row.³⁵

The construction of Queen's Road made possible the building of the Bristol Academy of Fine Arts, later to be known as the Royal West of England Academy. The fine building of 1857 was designed by John Hirst in the Italian style, the façade providing numerous recesses which were filled with statues. In 1866 work started on a new Museum and Library, situated beside the Volunteer Rifle Corps premises. This was designed by John Foster and Archibald Ponton for the Corporation of Bristol, in a Gothic style, with many decorative features reminiscent of a Venetian palace. The building cost some £14,000 and the grandly-titled Philosophical Institution and Library opened in 1874. It soon became a 'splendid new palace of erudition and culture'.³⁶

Thomas Tyndall died in 1869, leaving six daughters but no male heir. The family continued to live in the Royal Fort, and to maintain the surrounding gardens and lawns, but in the former park building development proceeded inexorably.

In 1877 five acres of the park were purchased by the governors of Bristol Grammar School and a new school building designed in the Gothic style by the Bristol architects John Foster and Joseph Wood, together with the headmaster's house, were built at a total cost of more than £20,000. The school moved from its buildings in Unity Street to the much more spacious surroundings of Tyndall's Park in 1879. It was followed a year later by the first buildings of the recently-formed University College, beginning a development which was eventually to cover most of the former parkland with academic buildings. On the other side of the Royal Fort, the Hospital for Sick Children was built at the top of St Michael's Hill in 1885. Among the most generous supporters of the new University were members of the Wills family, who were to remain its leading benefactors, finally crowning their generosity by the gift of the Wills Memorial Building which was designed by Sir George Oatley. Completed in 1925 it remains one of Bristol's finest buildings. It was given by George Alfred Wills and Henry Herbert Wills in memory of their father, Henry Overton Wills (1828-1911), who had given so much to the University and had been its first chancellor. Building work started before the First World War, and the Wills Memorial Building, as it became known, was constructed on the site of the former Blind Asylum and School of Industry which was now demolished. The new building also extended on to the site of the former Rifle Drill Hall which by that time had become a venue for circuses and other popular entertainments.

The dramatic architecture of the exterior, with its massive Gothic tower, 215 feet high, has become one of the best-known landmarks in Bristol, and the interior, with its splendid entrance and Great Hall, is equally remarkable. It is a tribute to the wealth of the Wills family as well as to the dedication and skill of the architect, Sir George Oatley, that throughout the building every detail of stonework, panelling, decoration and fitting is of the highest quality.³⁷

The Wills family also gave to the city a new and larger Museum and Art Gallery, designed by Sir Frank William Wills and built in 1899-1904, with the proud inscription 'The Gift of Sir William Henry Wills, Bart., to His Fellow Citizens 1904'. The massive new museum, situated beside the earlier Philosophical Institution and Library, involved the demolition of the Bishop's College building. The original museum building, with its distinctive 'Venetian' style, survived and later became the University Refectory. Sadly, the splendour of its decoration was badly damaged by bombing during the last war. Within the former park, Sir George Oatley also designed the Homeopathic Hospital (1921) at the top of St Michael's Hill, and the Baptist College in Woodland Road, built 1913-15.³⁸

The Tyndall family remained at the Royal Fort until 1916, and when the last of Thomas Tyndall's daughters left, the house and grounds were purchased by Henry Herbert Wills who presented them to the University, together with £200,000 for building the University's Physics Department. This building was also designed by Sir George Oatley, largely in the Gothic style, though intermixed with Classical features. It was completed in 1929.

During the later twentieth century, as the University and the Grammar School have expanded, a great many other buildings have been erected on the former parkland, although lacking the resources available to Sir George Oatley, few of the subsequent utilitarian structures bear any comparison with his masterpieces. The task of describing this multitude of twentieth-century houses, shops, offices and academic buildings of all sorts goes well beyond the scope of this pamphlet. At the heart of all the busy activity, however, the elegant Georgian architecture of the Royal Fort with its still secluded gardens remains as a charming reminder of the Tyndall family and of the spreading park which they established so close to the centre of Bristol.

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